

Willamette Valley Wineries The Place

The Willamette Valley, Oregon's leading wine region, has over two-thirds of the state's wineries and vineyards and is home to more than 200 wineries. It is recognized as one of the premier Pinot noir producing areas in the world and as the birthplace of New World Pinot noir. Other cool-climate varieties such as Pinot gris, Pinot blanc, Chardonnay, Riesling and Gewürztraminer are equally at home in the valley.

Nestled between Oregon's Cascade Mountains and the Coastal Range, Willamette Valley's terrain is varied and huge - more than 100 miles long and spanning 60 miles at its widest point. The climate boasts a long and gentle growing season - warm summer days with cool evenings, bursts of Indian Summer, mild winters and long, often rainy springs - perfect conditions for growing the cool-climate grape varieties for which Oregon is best known. In fact, the finicky Willamette Valley climate and its soils make it the promised land for Pinot noir in America. So, it's no surprise that more than 90% of the Oregon's Pinot noir is grown in the Willamette Valley.

Because of these prime growing conditions, the pastoral, rolling hills and valleys of the Willamette Valley are striped with vineyards and dotted with wineries. The number of wineries in the region is growing yet the valley remains small in its personal, handcrafted approach. The majority of wineries are family-owned establishments dedicated to a hands-on, artisanal winemaking style (nearly 70% of wineries make fewer than 5,000 cases). These small producers, along with larger, established wineries together contribute to the world-class reputation of the region's wine.

Even with all the notoriety and the growing number of wineries, the Willamette Valley is a place where wine enthusiasts and neophytes can personally meet winemakers and taste directly from the barrel or volunteer for crush and sort grapes with winery owners in a friendly, welcoming environment.

It's a place where winemakers and owners have worked together since the early pioneers arrived in the 70s & 80s, sharing everything from secrets to equipment. This unique combination of pioneering spirit and camaraderie has created a tight-knit community along with top-quality wines. And it's a place where wineries are dedicated to sustainable winegrowing and winemaking practices based on their respect for the land and desire to see future generations continue the winemaking tradition. Approximately 25% of Willamette Valley vineyards are certified sustainable by independent third party certification programs. Many more acres are becoming certified in a process that takes two to three years to complete.

Touring the Willamette Valley wine country takes patience, a good touring map, and an adventurous spirit. The closest wineries are less than an hour from Portland. With some of the wineries and tasting rooms tucked back from the road, perched in the hillside, or housed in old pig farms and barns, the Willamette Valley has a surprise waiting at every fork in the road. Small towns like Carlton, Lafayette and Dundee dot the map and larger cities like Eugene and Salem are brimming with art galleries, museums, gardens, and farmer's markets. With world-class dining, intimate country inns, nurseries and hazelnut farms, the Willamette Valley is worth exploring - one back road at a time.